

Marshall Memo 733

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education

April 23, 2018

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Quotes of the Week

“It seems that it comes very naturally for us to decide that when things go wrong, it must be because of some bad individual with bad intentions. We like to believe that things happen because someone wanted them to, that individuals have power and agency; otherwise, the world feels unpredictable, confusing, frightening.”

Hans Rosling (see item #1)

“None of us has enough mental capacity to consume all the information out there. The question is, what part are we processing and how did it get selected? And what part are we neglecting?”

Hans Rosling (*ibid.*)

“Good writing has always been driven by the desire to communicate something of great value and alter the reader’s state of mind.”

Yekaterina McKenney in “Making Student Writing Matter” in *Educational Leadership*, April 2018 (Vol. 75, #7, p. 33-37), <https://bit.ly/2Hq923J>; McKenney can be reached at ymckenney@warriors.winnacunnet.org.

“Individually correcting errors on student papers is among the least efficient uses of a teacher’s time.”

Mike Schmoker (see item #4)

“[W]e cannot plan lessons for students we do not teach; doing so means student voices are stripped from our instructional decision-making.”

Brian Kissel (see item #5)

“To grow as instructional leaders, principals tend to need coaching and support, much more than they need to be monitored or evaluated.”

Meredith Honig in “What a Difference a District Can Make” in *Phi Delta Kappan*, April 2018 (Vol. 99, #7, p. 42-48), www.kappanmagazine.org

1. Hans Rosling on Ten Human Instincts That Distort Our Thinking

In *Factfulness*, a book currently on *The New York Times* best-seller list, Hans Rosling, the late Swedish physician and statistician, describes ten ways we tend to misinterpret the world around us, and offers advice on how to do better:

- *The gap instinct* – This is what Rosling calls “that irresistible temptation we have to divide all kinds of things into two distinct and often conflicting groups, with an imagined gap – a huge chasm of injustice – in between.” For example, it’s common for people to see the world dramatically split between rich and poor countries. In fact, the 2017 world population is at four levels: Level 1, very poor, getting around on foot (about 1 billion people); Level 2, improving conditions, traveling by bicycle (3 billion); Level 3, more resources, traveling by motorcycle (2 billion); and Level 4, first-world countries, traveling by car (1 billion).

In short, says Rosling, there’s a range, and significantly, most people are in the middle, not the extremes. To control for the gap instinct, he advises:

- Beware of comparing averages. They have a way of disguising important in-between information.
- Beware of comparing extremes – for example, the extreme poverty in Sudan versus the comfortable existence of Western countries.
- Beware of seeing the world “from up here.” Looking at others through the lens of one’s own lived experience distorts what lies in the middle.

- *The negativity instinct* – This is the widespread tendency to notice the bad more than the good. Pollsters found that in 30 countries, more than half of the people surveyed believed things were getting worse. And indeed, there are many bad things happening: terrorism, overfishing, the crisis in Syria, rising seas, financial instability. But the big picture shows overall progress: the percent of humans living in extreme poverty fell from 85 percent in 1800 to 9 percent today; average life expectancy has risen from 31 in 1800 to 72 today. There have been dramatic improvements in a number of other areas: deaths from disasters, hunger, child labor, plane crash deaths, HIV infections, legal slavery, nuclear weapons, smallpox, ozone depletion, women’s right to vote, girls in school, literacy, democracy, child cancer survival, mobile phones, drinkable water, Internet access, and immunizations. To control for the negativity instinct, Rosling advises:

- Beware of the myth of a rosy past.
- Realize that things can be bad and better at the same time.
- Know that more news does not equal more suffering.

- Recognize that good news and gradual improvement are almost never reported.

• *The straight line instinct* – This is the tendency to believe that a trend line (for example, the population of the planet) will continue in linear fashion. But trends change; for example, the average number of babies per woman was almost 6 in 1800. Now it's 2.5. A number of important indicators change dramatically as people move from extreme poverty to Level 4, bending the curves: schooling, age of marriage, literacy, vaccinations. Rosling's takeaway: don't assume straight-line trends.

• *The fear instinct* – “None of us has enough mental capacity to consume all the information out there,” says Rosling. “The question is, what part are we processing and how did it get selected? And what part are we neglecting?” We focus on information that triggers fear: violence, sharp objects, forces of nature, loss of control, entrapment, contamination. But deaths from natural disasters, plane crashes, murders, nuclear leaks, and terrorism *combined* account for only 1 percent of people who die each year. *Frightening* and *dangerous* are two different things, says Rosling. “Paying too much attention to what is frightening rather than what is dangerous – that is, paying too much attention to fear – creates a tragic drainage of energy in the wrong direction... I would like my fear to be focused on the mega dangers of today, and not the dangers from our evolutionary past.” One more thing: When you're afraid, make as few decisions as possible until the panic has subsided.

• *The size instinct* – There's a strong tendency for people to get things out of proportion, misjudge size, and exaggerate the importance of one data point. “The media is this instinct's friend,” says Rosling. “It is pretty much a journalist's professional duty to make any given event, fact, or number sound more important than it is. And journalists know that it feels almost inhuman to look away from an individual in pain.” But individual numbers can be profoundly misleading. For example, in 2017, 4.2 million babies died worldwide. This sounds like a terrible number, and each death is tragic for the parents and families involved. But that number compares to 14.4 million babies dying in 1950. Given that perspective, 4.2 million is “beautifully small,” says Rosling. Tremendous progress has been made with infant mortality, and the trend continues. To control for the size instinct, it's important to:

- Put statistics in perspective.
- Apply the 80/20 rule: look at the few largest items on a list and deal with them first; usually, dealing with 20 percent takes care of 80 percent of the problem.
- Amounts and rates can tell very different stories, and rates are more meaningful, especially when comparing different-sized groups.

• *The generalization instinct* – “Categories are absolutely necessary for us to function,” says Rosling. “They give structure to our thoughts... Everyone automatically categorizes and generalizes all the time.” But generalizing can also distort our worldview. It can lead us to group people or things together – stereotyping – and jump to the conclusion that the people or things in that group are all alike. The gap instinct divides the world into “us” and “them” and the generalization instinct makes us think that “they” are all the same. To combat this instinct, Rosling suggests:

- Look for differences within groups.

- Look for similarities across groups.
- Look for differences across groups – don't assume that what applies to one group applies to another.
- Beware of “the majority.” It just means more than half, which could be 51 percent.
- Beware of vivid examples.
- Assume that people are not idiots.

• *The destiny instinct* – This is the idea that innate characteristics determine the destinies of people, countries, religions, and cultures – for example, that African nations will never catch up to Western levels of civilization. Rosling says we need to recognize that many things appear to be constant just because change is happening slowly, and that even slow change is still change. Some pointers:

- Keep track of gradual improvements.
- Update your knowledge.
- Talk to Grandpa – he will remind you of how values have changed.
- Collect examples of cultural change. “Challenge the idea that today's culture must also have been yesterday's, and will also be tomorrow's,” he says.

• *The single perspective instinct* – “We find simple ideas attractive,” says Rosling. “We enjoy that moment of insight, we enjoy feeling we really understand or know something. And it is easy to take off down a slippery slope...” Some examples: an ideologue who believes passionately in the free market, another who is committed to equality. The key, says Rosling, is to recognize that a single perspective can limit our imagination. Some advice:

- Test your ideas.
- Don't claim expertise beyond your field.
- Remember that no tool is good for every job.
- Use numbers, but not *only* numbers.
- Beware of simple ideas and simple solutions.

• *The blame instinct* – This is the human tendency “to find a clear, simple reason why something bad has happened,” says Rosling. “It seems that it comes very naturally for us to decide that when things go wrong, it must be because of some bad individual with bad intentions. We like to believe that things happen because someone wanted them to, that individuals have power and agency; otherwise, the world feels unpredictable, confusing, frightening.” The key, he says, is recognizing when a scapegoat is being used “and remembering that blaming an individual often steals the focus from other possible explanations and blocks our ability to prevent similar problems in the future.” Workarounds:

- Look for causes, not villains.
- Look for systems, not heroes.

• *The urgency instinct* – This is the tendency to believe it's now or never, you have to decide now, you won't have another chance. “Relax,” says Rosling. “It's almost never true. It's almost never that urgent, and it's almost never an either/or.” His advice:

- When your urgency instinct is triggered, take a breath.
- Insist on the data.

- Beware of fortune-tellers. Any predictions about the future are uncertain.
- Be wary of drastic action. Look at possible side effects. Ask how the idea has been tested. “Step-by-step practical improvements, and evaluation of their impact, are less dramatic but usually more effective.”

But Rosling says there are some global risks we *should* worry about: global pandemics, financial collapse, World War III, climate change, and extreme poverty.

Rosling closes with some thoughts on what we should be teaching young people to protect the next generation from a lot of ignorance:

- That there are countries at all different levels of health and income, and most are in the middle.
- Their own country’s socioeconomic position in relation to the rest of the world, and how that is changing.
- How their own country progressed through the income levels to get to where it is now, and how to use that knowledge to understand what life is like in other countries today.
- That people in less-developed countries are moving up the income levels and their lives generally are improving.
- What life was really like in the past so they do not mistakenly think that no progress has been made.
- How to hold these two ideas at the same time: that bad things are going on in the world, but that many things are getting better.
- That cultural and religious stereotypes are useless for understanding the world.
- How to consume the news and spot the drama without becoming stressed and hopeless.
- Common ways that people will try to trick them with numbers.
- That the world will keep changing and they will have to update their knowledge and worldview throughout their lives.

Most of all, Rosling concludes, we should be teaching our children humility and curiosity.

Factfulness: Ten Reasons We’re Wrong About the World – and Why Things Are Better Than You Think by Hans Rosling with Ola Rosling and Anna Rosling Rönnlung, Flatiron Books, 2018

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2. What Continuous Improvement Looks Like in a District

In this Education Development Center white paper, Karen Shakman, Jessica Bailey, and Nicole Breslow present a model for continuous improvement. They recommend starting with three essential questions:

- What problem are we trying to solve?
- What changes might we introduce and why?
- How will we know that a change is actually an improvement?

“Clear and specific measures that capture both the processes and the outcomes are critical to the continuous improvement process,” say Shakman, Bailey, and Breslow. They illustrate the

process with diagrams on possible causes and proposed solutions for the problem of high turnover of early-career STEM teachers:

- Lack of support:
 - Lack of relevant professional development
 - Limited time for collaboration with colleagues
 - Lack of supportive leadership
- Limited teacher knowledge:
 - Lack of pedagogical knowledge
 - Lack of subject matter knowledge
- Challenging school climate:
 - Testing and accountability pressure
 - Limited building resources
 - High needs of students and schools
- Inadequate compensation:
 - Low wages
 - High earning potential in other fields
 - Excessive unpaid overtime

The district sets a goal of increasing retention of early-career STEM teachers by 25 percent within two years and then articulates its strategy:

- Primary drivers:
 - Increase support for STEM teachers.
 - Increase teachers' knowledge.
 - Address workplace conditions.
- Secondary drivers:
 - Increase opportunities for collaboration with other STEM educators.
 - Provide more feedback and support from school leaders.
 - Provide opportunities to increase pedagogical content knowledge.
 - Increase resources for STEM classrooms.
 - Increase compensation of STEM teachers.
- Change ideas:
 - Establish weekly professional learning community meetings.
 - Train principals and mentors in effective feedback and support for early-career STEM teachers.
 - Partner with a local university to provide summer training.
 - Create a district-wide grant competition to provide STEM classroom resources for early-career teachers.
 - Create retention bonuses for STEM teachers.

“A Primer for Continuous Improvement in Schools and Districts” by Karen Shakman, Jessica Bailey, and Nicole Breslow, Education Development Center, February 2017, <http://ltd.edc.org/Teacher-leadership-programs-white-paper>

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3. Assertiveness 101

In this article in *Edutopia*, Kristin Stuart Valdes (Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility) defines assertiveness as the sweet spot between two extremes:

- Aggressive – Prioritizing your own needs; using threats or violence to get your way;
- Passive – Doing things you don't want to do because of pressure or threats;
- Assertive – Standing up for yourself without diminishing others; strong, not mean.

But there's a problem, says Valdes: "Assertive communication is a hard skill to learn. Our culture tends to reward aggression. Putdowns are framed as humor in cartoons and sitcoms, and the Internet can be a platform for bullying. It's hard to find examples of assertiveness in the public sphere."

That's why teachers need to explicitly teach assertiveness and conduct role-plays with hypothetical (but realistic) situations so students internalize and use these skills in everyday situations. Some techniques:

- *The "nice no"* – When a student feels pressured to go along with other people's ideas or invitations ("Do you want to trade snacks?"), it can be effective to say, "No, thanks" or "Thanks for asking, but not today." Making a counter-suggestion is a good follow-up.

- *Setting a boundary and holding to it* – When asked to do something outside your comfort zone ("Can I copy off your paper?"), it's effective to say, "No, I'm not comfortable with that" and not feel compelled to give reasons.

- *Asking for some thinking time* – When asked for something and you're not ready to answer, an assertive response is to say, "I'm not sure how to answer that right now. Can I get back to you later today?" It's important to ask for the amount of time you need to get more information, weigh other options, and reflect on your feelings about the situation.

- *Stating your needs* – It may seem that others are ignoring or disrespecting your needs when the problem is that you actually haven't articulated them clearly enough. For example, a student might say to a teacher, "Could you please repeat that? I need to hear the directions again."

- *Using an "I feel" message* – This may be the best way to communicate your feelings and emotional needs so others have a chance to understand – for example, saying to a friend, "I feel sad when you cancel our plans, because I love hanging out with you."

- *Responding to aggression* – Sometimes an assertive statement is met with an aggressive response. A good next step is to calmly remove yourself from the conversation, saying, "I think I communicated my thoughts clearly, so there's not much more to talk about."

"Modeling Assertiveness with Students" by Kristin Stuart Valdes in *Edutopia*, January 25, 2018, <https://www.edutopia.org/article/modeling-assertiveness-students>

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4. Mike Schmoker on Writing Across the Curriculum

(Originally titled “Demystifying Writing, Transforming Education”)

In this article in *Educational Leadership*, author/consultant Mike Schmoker says that having students write across subject areas, if accompanied with lots of reading and discussion, could have more impact on college and career success than any other practice. His argument:

- *The powerful impact of writing* – “Decades of research attest to writing’s unrivaled ability to facilitate understanding and help people evaluate, reconstitute, and synthesize knowledge,” says Schmoker. “Writing enables students to generate their best thinking in its most effective form.” That’s why, when business and industry hire new workers, they look for writing skills over managerial skills.

- *What works in classrooms* – Content-area writing is basically “thinking on paper,” says Schmoker. Students need to:

- Read texts (or examine data), underlining, annotating, or taking notes;
- Zero in on the notes, quotes, or underlined passages that are central to their analysis;
- Write to explore, clarify, or explain how these portions support the student’s arguments, observations, or interpretations.
- Do this kind of writing (as short as a paragraph, as long as a term paper) on a regular basis – every week, and at the end of every unit.

Frequent, text-based argumentative writing is the best way to put students on the path to long-term success.

- *Prompts to promote higher-order thinking* – Here are some writing prompts that help students make coherent arguments:

- Evaluate the credibility of a scientific theory, a mathematical solution, a politician...
- Explain why you agree (or disagree) with a fictional or historical character...
- Analyze/interpret/debunk a math or science model or data table, a work of fiction...
- Compare and contrast two musicians, artists, mathematical arguments, works of drama...
- Make recommendations or propose solutions for some real-world quantitative problem or social/environmental problem...

“I can tell you from experience and observation that students find such questions and prompts highly engaging,” says Schmoker. “They activate the intellect and lend purpose to learning in every discipline – including math, where writing is essential but grossly underutilized.”

- *Not letting grading discourage frequent writing* – “Individually correcting errors on student papers is among the least efficient uses of a teacher’s time,” says Schmoker. “The most powerful, time-efficient way to improve students’ writing is through focused, whole-class instruction. Teachers should model one aspect of writing, with each step followed by student practice, during which the teacher observes (and addresses) whole-class patterns of progress or need on that writing skill.” Repeating this cycle of instruction, practice, and feedback through a lesson, anchored by examples of good writing displayed on a document camera, “guarantees better writing,” says Schmoker – with the teacher grading only a few student writing products.

“Demystifying Writing, Transforming Education” by Mike Schmoker in *Educational Leadership*, April 2018 (Vol. 75, #7, p. 22-27), <https://bit.ly/2H5JoBY>; Schmoker can be reached at schmoker@futureone.com.

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5. Overcoming Obstacles to Effective Writing Instruction

(Originally “Six Roadblocks to Writing Instruction – and How to Find Alternative Routes”)

“Obstacles abound on the road traveled by writers and their writing teachers,” says Brian Kissel (University of North Carolina/ Charlotte) in this article in *Educational Leadership*. State mandates, national standards, high-stakes assessments, and some time-honored classroom practices can undermine good teaching. Kissel names six problematic practices and how teachers and administrators can address them:

- *Lack of time and scripted writing programs* – Students’ needs, not packaged programs and pacing guides, should drive instructional decision-making and time allocation. “Prescribed curricula typically provide interesting lesson ideas to use in the classroom,” says Kissel. “However, as students craft text and teachers confer with them, future lessons should be adapted based on what writers need rather than the next prescribed lesson... This does not mean teachers linger forever. They still need to set deadlines for published products and, as much as possible, push students to meet those deadlines.”

- *One teacher planning writing lessons for an entire grade-level team* – This strategy seems efficient, says Kissel, “But we cannot plan lessons for students we do not teach; doing so means student voices are stripped from our instructional decision-making.” Better for teachers to plan their own lessons and then bring student writing to team meetings to talk about students’ goals, habits, and processes and learn from colleagues’ successes and struggles.

- *Dictating the topics students write about* – Kissel believes this common practice does for students what they should be doing for themselves. It also silences stories that students feel compelled to tell. He was not happy when his daughter’s first-grade teacher allowed her to write and illustrate a 20-page book about lipstick, blush, and other beauty products. While Kissel would have preferred his daughter’s “passions to lean more toward brains than beauty, I’m glad she found a topic that ignited her writer’s soul.”

- *Making the writing process too formulaic* – As a first-year teacher, Kissel had his students plan their writing on Monday, draft on Tuesday, revise on Wednesday, edit on Thursday, publish on Friday, and take their finished pieces home for the weekend. “I expected my students to proceed through the ‘steps’ at the same time – neglecting to allow them any choice in the process. My ignorance came from not being a writer myself. I didn’t understand that writers work through their own processes, processes that are different for each writer and often for each new piece of writing.” After taking Writers’ Workshop training, Kissel moved to a much more organic process and started drafting, revising, and editing his own writing in front of his students, thinking out loud about all his decisions.

- *Teachers as the sole evaluators of student writing* – Kissel remembers a college writing teacher who provided minimal feedback on weekly writing assignments and gave almost all papers Cs based on a mysterious set of criteria. When Kissel became a teacher, he

made a point of having students attach a rubric-based self-evaluation to each paper they submitted. “Everyone benefits from having a seat at the assessment table,” he says. “Students benefit by having a voice in the process. Teachers benefit by better understanding the decisions students made as writers.”

• *Students focusing only on grades* – “When writers write for audiences and purposes bigger than school,” says Kissel, “they start to take pride in their work. They begin to see how their words are more powerful than whatever grade they earn in the class.” In his writing conferences, he asks students, “Who are you writing this for?” and “Why are you writing it?”

“Six Roadblocks to Writing Instruction – and How to Find Alternative Routes” by Brian Kissel in *Educational Leadership*, April 2018 (Vol. 75, #7, online only), <https://bit.ly/2JLU2z4>; Kissel can be reached at [btkissel@uncc.edu](mailto:bkissel@uncc.edu).

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6. Using Text Messages to Improve Kindergarten Attendance

“Even in the earliest years of schooling, student attendance is predictive of subsequent educational outcomes,” say Kenneth Smyth-Leistico (Seton Hill University) and Lindsay Page (University of Pittsburgh) in this article in *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*. The impact of chronic absenteeism (missing more than 10 percent of days in a school year) is especially negative for disadvantaged students. The authors report on a pilot program (dubbed Connect-Text) to improve the attendance of kindergarten students in a Pittsburgh school by sending two-way text messages to parents. About once a week, the school sent home three types of pre-programmed, personalized messages:

- Event/activity alerts – for example, “Reminder Parent-Teacher Conference Week: No Classes Thursday. Message me to reserve a slot with your teacher.”
- Individualized attendance messages (sent only when a child was absent) “[Parent name], we really missed [child’s name] today. Hope he feels better tomorrow. The field trip to the zoo will be great.”
- Support messages – for example, “Reading Rocks! Does your child have a favorite book? Text back and we’ll share your fav with your teacher.”

The messages (in English or Spanish) were positive in tone, expressed concern and offered assistance, and always invited a response. They were aimed at parents, since students at this age level are not purposefully absent, and drove home the message that attendance was important to children’s future school success.

The texts were prepared and scheduled in advance. They were customized by a bilingual AmeriCorps member whose other duties in the school included regularly interacting with students and working closely with local social service providers (her photo was included in the texts). She spent about 30 minutes a week monitoring parents’ responses, following up on requests, and passing along information to staff members. The only other expense of the program (which cost about \$6,000 in all) was the licensing of a technology platform, Signal Vine, to handle the texts.

How well did Connect-Text work? Before the program, attendance in the pilot school was significantly worse than that of other Pittsburgh elementary schools, with a higher rate of chronic absenteeism. The year Connect-Text was implemented, kindergarten attendance improved significantly, surpassing that of other schools. “Although we do not expect that messaging alone can solve the problem of chronic absenteeism entirely,” conclude Smyth-Leistico and Page, “our results suggest that increased positive communication between families and schools can help.”

“Connect-Text: Leveraging Text-Message Communication to Mitigate Chronic Absenteeism and Improve Parental Engagement in the Earliest Years of Schooling” by Kenneth Smyth-Leistico and Lindsay Page in *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, January-June 2018 (Vol. 23, #1-2, p. 139-152), <https://bit.ly/2Facu0H>; Page is at lpage@pitt.edu.

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7. The Multiple Roles of Instructional Coaches

In this article in *Tools for Learning Schools*, Joellen Killion and Cindy Harrison describe ten ways instructional coaches can improve student learning by providing direct support to teachers. “Naming the roles gives everyone a common language with which to consider the work of coaches,” say Killion and Harrison. “Juggling the demands of multiple roles and responsibilities; different individual teacher needs, goals, learning preferences, and personalities; classroom dynamics, daily schedules, and diverse curricula can be taxing. Coaches need to be flexible, yet consistent.” Here are the roles to be prioritized and planned according to each school’s needs:

- Resource provider:
 - Expanding teachers’ use of a variety of resources;
 - Gathering materials and articles;
 - Getting examples of best practice;
 - Recommending resource sites.
- Data coach:
 - Supporting the use of student work and assessment results to improve instruction;
 - Facilitating conversations that drive decisions in classrooms and teams;
 - Identifying classroom, grade-level, and schoolwide trends.
- Instructional specialist:
 - Helping teachers choose the most effective practices to deliver content;
 - Aligning curriculum and instruction to meet the needs of all students;
 - Supporting differentiation.
- Curriculum specialist:
 - Helping teachers unpack and prioritize required curriculum standards and materials;
 - Aligning the written, taught, and tested curriculum;
 - Establishing realistic pacing guides;
 - Deepening teachers’ content knowledge and integrating different curriculum areas.
- Classroom supporter:

- Co-planning and co-teaching lessons;
- Modeling effective instructional strategies;
- Observing, giving feedback, and fostering reflection.
- Learning facilitator:
 - Designing and facilitating effective professional development for teachers;
 - Facilitating study groups, lesson study, looking at student work, and co-visitations.
- Mentor:
 - Organizing schoolwide induction activities;
 - Helping with “new-to-teaching” and “new-to-the-school” issues;
 - Supporting effective classroom management.
- Member of the school’s leadership team:
 - Working with formal and informal leaders to plan, implement, and assess school initiatives;
 - Joining Learning Walk teams to monitor the implementation of best practices;
 - Serving as another set of eyes for the principal on change initiatives;
 - Coordinating the services of coaches and other resource personnel;
 - Aligning individual teacher goals with school goals.
- Catalyst for change:
 - Asking hard questions about current practices when they aren’t effective;
 - Introducing alternatives and refinements;
 - Supporting teachers as they make changes.
- Learner:
 - Continuously updating their own professional repertoire;
 - Modeling the attitudes and behaviors teachers need to be successful;
 - Modeling continuous learning and serving as a thought leader in the school;
 - Advocating for their own and mentees’ learning opportunities.

“Coaches’ Multiple Roles Support Teaching and Learning” by Joellen Killion and Cindy Harrison in *Tools for Learning Schools*, Winter 2018 (Vol. 21, #1, p. 1-3, 5-9, 15-18), no e-link available

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8. The Impact of Difficult-to-Read Math Problems

In this article in *American Educational Research Journal*, Candace Walkington (Southern Methodist University), Virginia Clinton (University of North Dakota), and Pooja Shivraj (Coppell Independent School District) report on their study of how the readability of mathematics problems affects different students’ performance. Looking at 20 years of NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) and TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) data, the authors found that when math problems’ word difficulty, length, and linguistic complexity were more challenging, the performance of certain students suffered: African Americans, Hispanics, students from lower-SES homes, and those with lower math proficiency. Conversely, those students benefited (more than their

counterparts) when the wording of math problems was concrete, concise, and understandable. “These types of readability modifications,” conclude Walkington, Clinton, and Shivraj, “may be critical to fairly teaching and evaluating students from diverse groups.”

“How Readability Factors Are Differentially Associated with Performance for Students of Different Backgrounds When Solving Mathematics Word Problems” by Candace Walkington, Virginia Clinton, and Pooja Shivraj in *American Educational Research Journal*, April 2018 (Vol. 55, #2, p. 362-414), <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.3102/0002831217737028>; Walkington can be reached at cwalkington@smu.edu.

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9. Short Items:

a. History videos – These 48 free videos explain the history of ideas in simple terms: <http://www.openculture.com/2015/09/47-animated-videos-explain-the-history-of-ideas-from-aristotle-to-sartre.html>

“48 Animated Videos Explain the History of Ideas: From Aristotle to Sartre” in *Open Culture*, September 16, 2015

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b. Site for writing ideas – *The New York Times* Learning Network series has this feature www.nytimes.com/column/learning-whats-going-on-in-this-picture that can be used as writing prompts for students.

Spotted in “Micro-Writing for English Learners” by Larry Ferlazzo in *Educational Leadership*, April 2018 (Vol. 75, #7, p. 48-49)

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*If you have feedback or suggestions,
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About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

This weekly memo is designed to keep principals, teachers, superintendents, and other educators very well-informed on current research and effective practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 48 years' experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, writer, and consultant lightens the load of busy educators by serving as their "designated reader."

To produce the Marshall Memo, Kim subscribes to 60 carefully-chosen publications (see list to the right), sifts through more than a hundred articles each week, and selects 5-10 that have the greatest potential to improve teaching, leadership, and learning. He then writes a brief summary of each article, pulls out several striking quotes, provides e-links to full articles when available, and e-mails the Memo to subscribers every Monday evening (with occasional breaks; there are 50 issues a year). Every week there's a podcast and HTML version as well.

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- Reader opinions
- About Kim Marshall (including links to articles)
- A free sample issue

Subscribers have access to the Members' Area of the website, which has:

- The current issue (in Word or PDF)
- All back issues (Word and PDF) and podcasts
- An easily searchable archive of all articles so far
- The "classic" articles from all 14 years

Core list of publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

All Things PLC
American Educational Research Journal
American Educator
American Journal of Education
American School Board Journal
AMLE Magazine
ASCA School Counselor
District Management Journal
Ed. Magazine
Education Digest
Education Next
Education Update
Education Week
Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis
Educational Horizons
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
English Journal
Essential Teacher
Exceptional Children
Go Teach
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Educational Review
Independent School
Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy
Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk (JESPAR)
Kappa Delta Pi Record
Knowledge Quest
Language Arts
Literacy Today
Mathematics Teaching in the Middle School
Middle School Journal
Peabody Journal of Education
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal
Principal Leadership
Reading Research Quarterly
Responsive Classroom Newsletter
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
School Administrator
School Library Journal
Social Education
Social Studies and the Young Learner
Teachers College Record
Teaching Children Mathematics
Teaching Exceptional Children
The Atlantic
The Chronicle of Higher Education
The Education Gadfly
The Journal of the Learning Sciences
The Language Educator
The Learning Professional (formerly Journal of Staff Development)
The New York Times
The New Yorker
The Reading Teacher
Theory Into Practice
Time Magazine